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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s, the world has undergone transformations in trade, industry, and technology. Some assert that the postmodern society needs organizational structures that allow for diversity, instability, unpredictability, and mobility. However, this paper argues that the headlong rush toward such organizational forms may well encourage the abandonment of commitments to longer term, more stable, and absolutely fundamental social and cultural objectives. During the last decade Australia has been greatly influenced by conservative English think tanks that advocate market solutions to social problems and the abdication of government from social responsibilities in favor of a competitive model of society in which the unfortunate would be supported by the most meager safety nets. Education in Australia is undergoing a battle for control of content, pedagogy, and assessment. The paper focuses on the reconstitution of the schools in Victoria, as it exemplifies tendencies elsewhere. The paper describes how a combination of current developments point toward great problems in the achievement of quality education: the vocationalization of the curriculum; the shifts toward competency-based education and assessment; the nationalization of curriculum and assessment; the nomination of the educational content that excludes notions of cultural difference and social justice; the reduction of resources through benchmarking; the devolution of responsibility for budget shortfalls but the centralization of control through managerial yardsticks in standards and frameworks; and the failures to recognize the complexity of learning, teaching, and schooling. Simultaneously, the reduction of collective mechanisms makes protest and the reassertion of our collective responsibilities that much more difficult. These developments constitute a major challenge to educators concerned with the construction of a culturally diverse, socially just, quality education for all. (Contains 36 references.) (LMI)

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THE STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATION

ED 474 750

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The world has changed greatly since the 1960s. The economic influence of 'Mother England' has waned. The United States and Japan have moved to centre stage while recently being challenged by the tiger economies of Asia and, potentially by the biggest tiger of them all - China. Trade is no longer a settled pattern but transport and communications have allowed the emergence of peripatetic industries with global visions that have little to do with nation-states - except as sources of greater or lesser political stability; of more or less docile labour forces; greater or lesser tax regimes or as sources of subsidies - for establishment costs, transport costs, power costs, labour costs, welfare costs and most particularly, the cost of education and knowledge production.

Industry itself is being transformed - currently through processes of modelling international 'best practice'. Here the applications of communications and numerical control technologies - among others - have transformed mass production into diverse, short run, decentralised production which shifts rapidly between styles and markets. Even in complex information technology such as computers, product runs are now calculated in months rather than years - with resulting headaches for retailers. 'Just in time' supplier schedules are imposed to lessen the chance of outdated production and the whole cycle of innovation, design, production, marketing, distribution and sales is speeded up. This increased speed is made possible by information, about markets, about possibilities, about innovations, about demand. Indeed it is claimed, by Postner among others, that we have shifted from an industrial economy to an information economy on a global basis. Or, as others have claimed, that we have entered the era of 'fast capitalism' (Bates 1995).

Now, while there is a great deal of hyperbole in such claims, especially for large sectors of the Third World's population, the significance of information as a function of political, economic and industrial organisation is central to contemporary society. It always has been, of course, but now there is far more of it, it travels faster and it has greater repercussions. For instance, if money is seen as a form of information and foreign exchange markets as centres of its negotiation, then the instantaneous international transfers of such information can easily be seen as a major organising or disorganising force in all modern societies.

One of the major consequences of such transformations is that older forms of governmental and industrial organisation through bureaucracies are now regarded as historically irrelevant - their rigidities and hierarchies of control encouraging response times that are too slow to cope with the need for 'real-time' decisions. What is needed in the post modern society is organisational structures that allow for, and cope with, diversity, instability, unpredictability and mobility. So we are told. Such post modern enthusiasm seems to me only justified in part. Certainly, more adaptable forms of organisation are

required. Perhaps, in some areas, more rapid response times are required. Constant revision, adaptation and change are necessary. However, the headlong rush towards such organisational forms may well encourage us to abandon commitments to longer term, more stable and absolutely fundamental social and cultural objectives.

On The Importance of States, Law and Society.

As Michael Pusey [1991] reminds us, societies like ours have not one but two fundamental co-ordinating mechanisms: on the one hand the economy, money and markets and on the other, states, law and civil institutions. While the post modern condition originates within the former the latter cannot simply be abandoned - rather it must be transformed through a dialectic which reasserts the importance of social legitimacy, equity and integrity in the operations of the economy, markets and money: a matter which is of some current consequence in Italy, France, Britain, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, the United States, Canada and not least in Australia and New Zealand, as they struggle against various forms of official corruption.

Some of these countries are of course 'failing economies' and some 'succeeding' economies. The seductions of growth or the desperation of decline have social and cultural consequences which transform the organisation of society through a newly turbulent political process which is itself subject to transformation through new forms of communication.

One of the major consequences within the public sphere is the breakdown of established political settlements. As Iannaccone [1983] suggests, following Schattschneider [1960], "....organisation is the mobilisation of bias." Forms of public organisation are especially so and the past decade has seen a series of challenges to the particular historical settlements that previously mobilised particular biases in the provision of public services, transport, communications, health, law and not the least education.

Off to Market, Jiggety Jig

One of the common characteristics of Australian political life during the past decade has been the extraordinary influence of conservative, right wing English political think tanks and their Antipodean clones, (The Sydney Institute, The Tasman Institute, The Institute of Public Policy and others). Their ideological business has been to advocate market 'solutions' to social problems and the abdication of government from social responsibilities in favour of a competitive dog-eat-dog model of society in which the unfortunate would be supported by the most meagre safety nets: safety nets which, in the English case, do not include even the most minimal of a minimum wage.

This determination that markets, money and the economy are to prevail over the state, law and civil institutions as the major steering mechanisms of English society led to the rejection of the social chapter of the Maastricht Treaty and the jeopardising of Britain's membership of the European community. This incident points up quite well the difference between the social democratic roots of the successful European economies [Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Sweden] and the rejection of the social by the failing economies such as Britain. It is a rejection of the social role of government that is most clearly put in Thatcher's oft-quoted declaration that 'there is no such thing as society - only individuals and their families'.

With such a highly ideological antagonism to any conception of the social it is hardly surprising that Thatcherism has led to the incapacity to govern that plagues John Major, for a fundamental ideological commitment to the abolition of society brings with it the implication that government itself should be abolished. If, indeed, it is 'every dog for itself' then the current rash of commercial excesses and abuses on the part of government ministers, and the relatives of Prime Ministers, Mark Thatcher among them, is unsurprising. What is perhaps surprising, at least to the English market radicals, is that society seems about to strike back!

The ideological and political attack on education in the United Kingdom is very much centered upon those who are committed to sustaining the notion of the social, and moreover, supporting the idea of the social responsibility of government in areas of equity and social justice. Advocates of such views are branded Marxist and the 'failure' of the failing economy is laid (inappropriately) at their feet. The Spectator, for instance, in its attack on teacher education had this to say:

> ".....teacher training colleges ..... are staffed by Marxists who peddle an irrelevant, damaging and outdated ideology of anti-elitism to the trainees in their charge [the solution to this problem is to remove] the statutory bar on state schools hiring those with no teacher training qualifications.....[which]..... would enable head teachers to find people who at the moment are deterred by the prospect of having to waste a year undergoing a period of Marxist indoctrination."
>
> [Spectator 27 February, 1993; 5]

Moreover, such 'indoctrination' is suggested as not only ideologically offensive but also a major cause of teacher training actually diminishing the effectiveness of teachers. The Spectator again:

> ".....Anyone who wants to teach in a state school in this country must, by law, hold a qualification from an establishment approved for teacher training. The state sector includes the worst schools in the land, in terms of the quality of the product they turn out. Anyone who wishes to

teach in a private school in this country can be admitted to the staff at the discretion of the head teacher, irrespective of that person's qualifications. The private sector includes the best schools in the land, in terms of the product they turn out. It appears at last to be dawning on this government, after 14 years in office, that these two points are related."

[1993; 5]

Such editorials derive directly from the ideological work of members of right wing think tanks like the 'Centre for Policy Studies'. Sheila Lawlor, a member of the Centre of Policy Studies for instance, is quoted as saying that teacher training 'undermines' the quality of graduates who enter teaching."

[Lawlor, 1990]

This ideological construction of teacher education, remote though it is from the rather conservative middle class, middle aged, middle of the road reality of teacher education establishments, is part of a concerted attempt to reposition teacher educators as perverse, incompetent, socially subversive and as solely responsible for the collapse of the British education system and therefore the British economy. The politically imperative, therefore, is to:

> ".....set aside ..... the professional educators and the majority of organised teacher unions ..... [who] are primarily responsible for the present state of Britain's schools."
>
> [Hillgate Group 1987]

Apparently the trouble all began in the 1960's when radicalism had its roots. In particular the New Right worries about:

> ".....the student radicals of the 1960's who have marched through to leading positions in departments of education."
>
> [Campaign for Real Education, 1989]

The solution proposed is perverse; breaking open teacher education through such measures as the Licensed Teacher Scheme which filled vacancies with unqualified teachers and gave them 'on the job training'. The scheme neither required such appointees to be graduates nor to register as students at a university. Another scheme was the Articled Teacher Scheme which saw graduate students placed in schools as supernumeraries while still being registered at a higher education institution [see Whitty, 1994]. These trends were furthered by a 1992 announcement that 80% of secondary postgraduate courses were to be school based, though this was later cut to 66%. As Whitty suggests:

> ".....Many in the profession feared that [these policies] heralded a total transfer of teacher training out of higher education into the schools, so

that the nature of teacher education could be transformed out of all recognition."

[Whitty, 1994; 3]

As Stuart MacLure observed:

> ".....the thing to remember about Government plans for teacher training is that there is a plot and a sub-plot. The plot is straightforward. Give practising teachers a bigger part to play in the professional preparation of their future colleagues. This is a good idea ..... The sub-plot is more sinister. It is to take teacher training out of the universities and colleges and ultimately to sever the connection between the study of education in higher education and its practice in schools. This is a deeply damaging idea and must be fought tooth and nail ..... The [proposals] must be examined closely for insidious attempts to dismantle the traditional defences of the teaching profession."
>
> [MacLure, 1993]

Simultaneously with this attack on the structures and professionalism of teacher education an attempt is being made to transform the content of teacher education, restricting and narrowing its focus. The objective of transferring training to schools and restricting its focus to required competencies serve the same end. As Whitty argues:

> "..... perhaps partly because of the reluctance of schools to collaborate with the government's attempts to deprofessionalise teaching, the Government has not yet gone for a policy of total deregulation. Instead it has introduced a common list of competencies to be required of beginning teachers, regardless of the nature of the route by which they have achieved them ..... This has given rise to the suspicion that the government wants to deprofessionalise teaching in a second sense - by ensuring that, wherever they are trained, teachers focus on the development of craft skills rather than professional understanding. Just as the basing of training in particular schools can limit the development of a wider perspective, so can specifying particular competencies encourage restricted rather than extended notions of professionalism and professionality."
>
> [Whitty, 1994; 9]

The specification of competencies and the assessment and funding of teacher education according to the demonstration of such competencies by students is clearly the preferred mechanism for the "reculturing" of the educational industry. The message is made clear in Government Circular 9/92:

"....higher education institutions, schools and students should focus on the competencies of teaching throughout the whole period of initial teacher training."

The Australian Experience

Australia seems to have caught the disease. Like England, Australia in the late 1980's was suffering a recession. In our case one induced by the unrestrained borrowing, poor judgement and subsequent bankruptcy of various entrepreneurial heroes of the deregulated excitement of the early 1980's - a recession whose price was subsequently paid by the public sector through a reduction of funds and the diversion of large swathes of public assets to largely overseas buyers, who saw the whole episode as a fire sale of unprecedented opportunity. But, setting that appalling scenario aside for the moment, its aftermath was an ideology which saw the unification, standardisation and with various degrees of severity, the privatisation of public service in Australia, as a 'precondition' for economic recovery.

As Pusey [1991] showed, in department after department of Government 'free market' econocrats replaced professionals as managers, thus severing connections between government policy and professional expertise. Or as Knight put it specifically in relation to education:

> ".....the 1987 construction of the Department of Employment, Education and Training saw the domination of econocrats and managers [who were already ascendant in the Treasury, Finance, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Trade] in DEET itself, along with the marginalisation, displacement, co-option or removal of the professional educators."
>
> [Knight, 1993; 10]

As MacIntyre observes, "the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers: they have already been governing us for some time."

[1983: 245]

Subsequently a whole series of reports - many of them initiated by Minister Dawkins, repositioned education. Fundamental to these reforms were some six declarations:

1. Education and training are central to micro economic reform and industry restructuring.

2. There are fiscal limits to the amount available to the state for education/training. Therefore, education itself, as an industry,

must be restructured for greater efficiency, improved outcomes/output and political accountability.

3. The quality of teaching is central to the quality of schools, to more effective training and to student outcomes. Teacher education is in turn central to the quality of learning and must itself be reformed.

4. Education and training should be unified in to a national system, and if not unified, then must be at least compatible.

5. The Commonwealth hegemony in establishing a national system must be demonstrated.

6. This programme is justified by the "National interest".

[After Knight, 1993]

This agenda makes clear the shift in the definitions of education, its ideological construction, and its repositioning within the reconstruction of Australian society. As Knight, Lingard and Bartlett argue:

> ".....the earlier evolution of liberal-progressive forms of ... education has been displaced by a new, more prescriptive managerialist and economic rationalist position... It is as if a new paradigm ... is emerging."
>
> [1993: 25]

And indeed so it is. It is a paradigm that locks education into a heavily orchestrated harmony through the development of a National Curriculum, a National Assessment Policy, a National Teaching Council, a National Professional Development Project, and 'National Teacher Competencies'.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed I am not a supporter of states' rights on this issue. In an era of instant communications and transformed information flows it seems to me appropriate that we move towards a national system of education. Indeed, I strongly support the Australian Education Union initiative towards the construction of a negotiated national education system through its advocacy of an 'Education Nation'. Their advocacy of a Federal/State agreement on funding for schools based on shared responsibility and a 50/50 split; national schooling standards based upon measured outcomes and resource guarantees; $1 billion more for primary schools, to bring our schools up to average international funding levels; a comprehensive national strategy for technology in education and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seem to me to constitute a program which both I and perhaps the Parents and Citizens Association might well support.

However, while the creation of a national system is imperative, the ways in which such a system is approached are of even great importance. Attempts to change the work of schools, to change the organisation of schools and to change the control of schools are currently under way in all parts of Australia. The changes are the subject of controversy and are in many cases directed by a commitment to the ideals of fast capitalism, marketisation, privatisation and economic rationalism. It is the case that historically schools have responded fairly directly to such changes in their environment. However, it is also the case that schools historically have a fundamental commitment to social justice as well as to economic and managerial transformation. It is of great importance that such a commitment is maintained and enlarged within the transformed structures that will emerge during the next decade. Parents have a major role to play in ensuring that our commitment to a shared social future is not abandoned in the face of the ideological attack of the privatisers and the marketeers.

Changes in the work of Schools

The work of schools is accomplished through three main message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein 1975). In each of these areas major changes are taking place - in various tempo in different parts of the country but generally in similar directions.

For instance the curriculum in most Australian states is undergoing major revision. The starting point for this revision is the reform agenda set out by Minister Dawkins in his 1988 paper 'Strengthening Australia's Schools.' Given our federal constitution the Commonwealth's agenda for education could only be carried out with the cooperation of the states - the majority of which were of the same political persuasion as the Commonwealth Government in 1988. Since then, of course, things have changed and the issue of 'State's rights' has been raised vociferously by state governments of a somewhat different political persuasion. As a result the collaborative development of a national curriculum has been overtaken by assertions of independence through which various states have taken the national framework and adapted or 'improved' the framework to meet local conditions. Nonetheless, there is a general drift towards a similar model in most states. This is despite very considerable controversy over the nature and purposes of the curriculum.

The public debate has focussed on three main kinds of arguments, as Cherry Collins indicates:

> The first are arguments over the general idea of, or current general political flavour of, the national curriculum; the second are arguments within each of the eight areas of knowledge about the quality of what the contracted writers have achieved; the third are arguments over what the

national curriculum will be used for and who will have access to any data it generates.

[Collins,1994a:4]

The first argument has interestingly become a battle between business and industry on the one hand [The Business Council of Australia, The Australian Chamber of Manufacturing and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry are strongly for] and conservative intellectual elites on the other [Leonie Kramer for instance is strongly against]. The second argument has in fact degenerated into eight separate battlegrounds within which antagonists slug out the contested meanings of each of the curriculum areas including that wonderful new hybrid Society and the Environment and that rather puzzling newcomer - Technology Studies. The third argument has been constituted around questions of who owns the curriculum. Is it for teachers as guidance and support and an extension of their professional knowledge and resources? Is it for parents who will be able to call teachers and schools to account by measuring their performance against the Standards and Frameworks? Is it for state or national governmental audits basically about who is to be in charge, who is to have control.

What we are seeing at the moment is a battle for control of quite interesting proportions. It is a battle over content: what selection of available knowledge shall be made available in schools; a battle over pedagogy, about how such knowledge shall be communicated [produced and reproduced]; and a battle over assessment, about how the realisation of such knowledge shall be measured and whose purposes such measurements shall serve.

Basically, as Cherry Collins has observed, we are seeing, through the Finn and Meyer reports, and especially through the Competency Based Education movement, a major, concerted attempt on the basis of industry, unions and government to vocationalise the curriculum of schools. As 'Australia Reconstructed' put it - to make education the instrument of economic recovery, or, as Finn put it - to establish the convergence of general and vocational education.

The National Curriculum and the various state adaptations of it are all firmly set within such an agenda. Interestingly enough it is not an agenda being currently pursued by successful economies such as Germany [which is the supposed model for the vocationalisation of education]. The competencies push began in Thatcher's England through the National Vocational Qualifications system. It has spread almost exclusively into other English-speaking countries characterised by failing economies with conservative leadership inclined towards authoritarian social policies, *laissez faire* economic policies and a theory of government which abandons political responsibility to the vagaries of reified 'markets'.

In education - whether it be general or vocational - the resulting policies display a complete and active distrust of those who are the best practitioners of the trade and a determination to restructure what Jim Callaghan called the 'secret garden of the curriculum' for business purposes. The result as Collins points out:

> ".....is an authoritarian one in which a great deal of money has been spent on public training and administrative structures and millions spent developing outcome statements of competency elements building towards competency units and modules which are then nationally imposed."
>
> [Collins1993:30]

These developments have slid easily into the Australian education system as a result of our traditional preoccupation with education as a vocational tool. The overwhelming ideology in Australia has been that the point of education is employment. Such an ideology is only possible in a country without a sense of history, with no experience of the powerful tensions between the ideals of alternative social futures and the conflicts which they can generate. A lucky country indeed, though in the original ironic sense of Donald Horne's title.

The contrast with European traditions could hardly be greater. Within the OECD for instance, education for democracy/citizenship, for cross-language and cultural communication, for moral and aesthetic development are strong ideas which are seen as fundamental in both general education and vocational education. Sweden's *vocational* post-compulsory program includes Swedish, English, civics, religion, mathematics, science, sports, and arts. In Australia we are moving the other way. Witness the curious pirouette around the issue of cultural studies in the National Curriculum, or the Meyer Report's extraordinary claim that cultural studies could not be encapsulated within the competencies framework and therefore could not be part of the curriculum, or again in the rather odd incorporation of studies of society with studies of the environment.

The move towards the subordination of the social to the economic, the cultural to the vocational and broad-based education to the narrow confines of competency-based vocational education is strong in Australia. Despite its claims it is unlikely to deliver us a quality education. This is for several reasons.

Firstly: CBE comes out of a behaviourist tradition which sees learning as the accretion of separate skills, a collection of building blocks which simply sum into a totality. The difficulty with this notion is that the overwhelming evidence from cognitive psychology is that (a) learners are active cognisers rather than passive recipients of behavioural conditioning; and that (b) learning tends to be holistic - several dimensions of a situation being explored

simultaneously by the learner. The evidence is that the "break it down into bits and then put it together" approach to learning is a massive waste of time and resources and also an approach that significantly reduces motivation.

Secondly: although Meyer and Finn and the CBE movement stress the generic nature and the transferability of their required competencies, the evidence is that such competencies are mostly situation specific, ie. they are not as easily portable as is assumed. For instance, 'problem solving' is not a generic competence at all. As Collins puts it:

> ".....Solving the conceptual, aesthetic and skill problems of painting an art work, has almost nothing in common with solving the problems in an algebra set."
>
> [Collins1993:35]

And again:

> ".....Most people competent in classical piano performance are not even competent in jazz piano performance, even though the keyboard skills appear the same."
>
> [Collins1993:35]

Thirdly: what constitutes evidence of competent performance is also unclear. Performance of tasks is the ostensible measure of competency-based education but how <u>many</u> performances under what variety of situations are needed in order to demonstrate competence? A cook, who can produce a wonderful - indeed perfect sponge on one set of equipment, may not be able to do so immediately on other equipment - nor be expert in cooking Tandoori chicken. It is most unclear what range of performances must be assessed in order to judge competence - especially, for instance, of such supposedly 'generic' skills as 'problem solving'.

The general conclusion that must be drawn regarding the competency based foundations of the emerging vocationalised curriculum is that (a) its intellectual foundations are extremely shaky; and that (b) in terms of return on expenditure the cost/benefit ratio is unacceptable. As Cherry Collins suggests:

> ".....the mountain of competencies has laboured and brought forth a lava flow of committees, working papers, national and state boards, offices, councils, training bodies, authorities, advisory groups and secretariats. Embedded in the larva flow is an alarming diversion of resources into a multiplication of bureaucracies. In Western Australia in 1982, the ratio of support staff, ie. managers in TAFE to full time teaching staff was 1 manager to 16 teachers. The ratio is now 1:9, ie. almost 2 managers for

those 16 teachers [Beevers, 1993]. The real results have been almost nil."

Even where the model has been articulated in a detailed form as it has in the Victorian 'Standards and Frameworks' Document [Board of Studies 1994], the issues raised above will not go away. Neither will the problems of articulating such a framework within the culture and organisation of schools. Alan Bishop has made some very cogent comments on these difficulties which I will quote at length as they are particularly pertinent.

> ".....What is the verdict on the draft Curriculum and Standards Framework? It was sent out to schools and other institutions in late July for consultation, and comments were due by 3 September 1994.
>
> The Board of Studies will no doubt tell us the results of the consultation in due course, but it is surprising how little public debate on the CSF there has been, particularly as it is intended to be the significant force shaping the Victorian schools' curriculum over the next few years.
>
> I have no problem with curricular guidelines or frameworks, provided they are just that. I also agree about the need for all students to experience a broad and balanced school curriculum. But I do have several concerns about the CSF in its present form.
>
> The frameworks document is clearly a detailed piece of work, and a lot of people have put in a lot of time producing it. Unfortunately, one consequence is that it is far too detailed and wordy. It is difficult to imagine how teachers might use it.
>
> The structure elements of levels and strands have been tried elsewhere and, to my mind, are still inadequate as the basis of a curriculum framework. Levels in several key learning areas are very speculative and artificial because there is no research or practical basis for them. Some curriculum ideas just can't be levelled in that way.
>
> The strands, all 38 of them, may well have an internal logic within the eight key learning areas, but they make little overall sense as a curriculum structure for a student. They are uneven in size, scale and importance and there are few links between them.
>
> The forcing of the school curriculum into eight areas is going to cause several problems for schools, although they will be different problems for primary and secondary schools. Integrated or thematic work in primary schools will be difficult to sustain under this model, particularly if there is to be detailed reporting and testing of each key learning area separately.

In secondary schools the problems will be with coverage, minority subjects and core and option arrangements ~~and core and option arrangements~~ at years 9 and 10. There are also likely to be fights within the key learning areas, such as studies of society and the environment, for adequate slices of the time and resources cake for teachers of history and geography for example.

The real problem that I see with the CSF, however, is that it does not start where the schools are. Rather, it tries to tell them where their students should be. It is a prescription for detailed assessment and reporting, not a framework for curriculum planning. In fact, it is written at the wrong level for schools. There are natural differences between three levels of any curriculum: the intended level, the curriculum as implemented by teachers and schools and the curriculum achieved by the students.

The CSF is aimed at the intended level, and therefore, as a framework, it should be helping the teachers and schools at the level of implementation. But because it prescribes what the students should achieve, it effectively by-passes the school level altogether.

Schools may therefore find it difficult to use the CSF as an organising curriculum framework because they operate with classes, year groups, teachers and weekly timetables, not strands and levels, which are theoretical ideas more related to assessment. Principals and curriculum co-ordinators need frameworks that actually relate to the real world of the school timetable."

[TheAge13Sept1994]

The question here is then, what is such a curriculum for? Who is it for? Can it be integrated with the daily life of schools? Is it intended as a support for teachers and students or a yardstick against which they may be measured and punished for their non-compliance? Is it, indeed, little more than a management tool designed to produce compliance in a decentralised system of school organisation?

If the work of schools is being restructured in such significant ways, what of the organisation of schools? Are schools indeed to be transformed in ways which serve the new agenda? Are the <u>cultural</u> relations of schools to be reconstituted and if so, in what ways?"

<u>The Organisation of Schools</u>

Here I will focus mainly on the reconstitution of schools that is taking place in Victoria as it exemplifies tendencies elsewhere.

As Simon Marginson [The Age 19 July 1994] has observed, the 'Schools of the Future' program in Victoria:

> ".....signifies the abandonment of resource equality across the system and the substitution of corporate forms of devolution for the democratic forms that were traditional in Victorian education. It paves the way for the longer-term transition to market-based schooling in the state sector.
>
> Here the Government has an ambitious agenda. It wants to reconstruct three basic relationships that together constitute a system of schooling.
>
> The first is the relationship between the school and its community. Parents are being turned into consumers of the individual school rather than citizen-members of a common system of schools, in which everyone has an interest in everyone else's welfare. The old idea of political participation in local school governance has been split between school management on one hand, and private economic consumption on the other.
>
> The second is the relationship between the school and the Government. Schools of the Future devolves managerial responsibilities and some of the responsibilities for funding and staffing to the local school level, but educational policy is more firmly recentred under government control. At the same time, individual schools [rather than the state school system as a whole] are now responsible for educational and social outcomes, and system-wide resources and outcomes are being removed from the agenda.
>
> The new school councils have the impossible job of implementing the funding cuts. They have been placed under tremendous pressure to raise resources. No doubt many councils would like to blame the Government for the predicament they are in. But in future the councils will formulate their *own* funding cuts, and the political pressures will be taken off the Government.
>
> The third is the relationship between the schools and other schools. State schools have been placed in competition with each other. Instead of all schools being encouraged to do well, the success of one school is now the failure of another. Schools are competing directly for private funding, and also for government support, especially if funding is proportional to enrolments. Inevitably, the academic record of each school [and perhaps the results of standardised tests] will be the main indicator of its competitive standing. Because a school's academic record is not only a function of the educational process, but is also

affected by the background of its students, this will penalise schools in the north and west of Melbourne, and in some parts of the country.....

Above all, the Government and its key supporters are interested in *outcomes*: not educational outcomes, so much as social outcomes through education."

Smyth [1993] has argued much the same case.

This should come as no great surprise as it has indeed been the experience of at least two other comparable systems. For instance, Geoff Whitty [1994] and Richard Bowe, Stephen Ball, and Ann Gold [1993] report that the English experiment in constructing competitive educational markets within the state system, largely seems to have increased educational inequalities. Whitty, for instance, after a thorough review of available research on the English experience, has this to say:

> ".....If we look at the whole package of reforms, linking parental choice, school autonomy, the National Curriculum and National testing, I think the conclusion has to be that the reforms in England and Wales are tending to exacerbate differences between schools and between the pupils who attend different schools. There is a disproportionate representation of socially advantaged children in the schools deemed to be most 'successful', and of socially disadvantaged children in those schools identified as 'failing'. All this is creating a vertical hierarchy of schools rather than the responsive horizontal diversity which the advocates of the reform claimed would emerge."
>
> [Whitty,1994:4]

In New Zealand, similar results are emerging as [Bruce 1994], Gordon [1992, 1993], Capper [1994] and Lauder [1994] have shown.

Evidence of such results and the social implications are rejected by the Victorian Minister of Education. Despite the marketing of the Schools of the Future program on the basis of the 'success of the Canadian experience' [represented in fact by 200 schools in the Edmonton region] and the idea that such changes were of no value unless they led to improved outcomes, the Minister now argues in the face of evidence of negative outcomes that 'outcomes measures and indices are a lot of rubbish' [Whitehead 1994]. So much for accountability!

But accountability is at least one of the fundamental issues at the heart of the changed process which brings me to my third major concern - changes in the control of education.

The Control of Education

Many of the changes with which we are confronted have been sold as changes that will deliver:

- More democratic community involvement
- More parental choice
- Schools that will be better managed
- Schools that will be more effective

[Smyth1993]

The reality according to Smyth, Codd and others is that:

- Schools are pitted against one another for resources and students.
- Teachers are rewarded for compliance and pupil performance on narrow measures;
- Students are assessed against nationally defined yardsticks that have managerial rather than educational value.

And all of these changes are underpinned by a continuing, refrain: schools are too expensive and grossly inefficient. Both structural reforms and micro-economic reforms need to be imposed in order to achieve efficiencies. As Smyth suggests with regard to Schools of the Future

> ".....We are being told that ..... schools as they exist in Victoria are inefficient. To be more accurate, what the government is really arguing about is that schools as we have them are too expensive, and that what we really need are leaner forms of operation.
>
> [Smyth1993]

Just how much leaner the Australian education system can be without a serious decline in quality is an arguable point. Australia is already low down the list of OECD countries with which we like to compare ourselves. We are in fact third from the bottom - 15th out of 18 OECD countries in the percentage of gross domestic product spent on education despite having 30% more of our population of school age [World Bank 1994].

Within these appalling figures the situation for schools is decidedly the worst of all education sectors as the proportion of that low overall rate of expenditure on education contains within it a proportion devoted to higher education which is the third *highest* in the OECD. We spend about as much of our national wealth on schools as do the three poorest European countries - Greece, Portugal and Spain. And even that 4.5% is projected to decline by the year 2000 to 3.5% [Finn 1991].

One of the mechanisms by which such a reduction is to be brought about may well be the Benchmarking survey initiated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) which is about to be conducted on its behalf by the Industry Commission.

Following the benchmarking surveys of Government Trading Enterprises- such as comparisons of the relative costs of electricity generation between the states and with international best practice conducted last year, the Industries Commission has been asked to turn its attention to education, health, social welfare and law and order - government service industries. Inputs are to be measured against outputs, comparisons made and recommendations for best practice, eg. lowest cost per unit of production made. So far the approach adopted by the working party is simplistic in the extreme and bodes ill for the future funding of education in Australia.

In passing it is worth noting that the early Australian Schools Commission Studies of comparative expenditure were used in part to shame low spending ministers into spending more - often with Commonwealth assistance. Since Dawkins however, such comparisons are used to justify the reduction of expenditure in the "high spending" states. All within that shamefully low envelope of 4.5% of GDP.

It is entirely possible that COAG will wish to use such figures to negotiate a new definition of roles and responsibilities in education. This is, of course, a recurrent theme between Commonwealth and State governments. But there does currently seem to be renewed interest in this issue as many State and Commonwealth politicians seek a more "rational" division of responsibilities. One such reorganisation has been mooted as a possibility for education. The Commonwealth for instance might well be prepared to withdraw from its interests in school education and roll its education payments into the general purpose grants in return for a greater Commonwealth role in the vocational education and training sector.

This however, would only be done within an agreement over management arrangements for (a) greater privatisation of services, and (b) better management tools for the delivery of government services. But it seems a much less likely outcome given Crean's recent attack on the Victorian Government for its misdirection of Commonwealth General Grant funds intended for education and his question as to whether' untying grants is the way to go' (18 July 1995)

This is clearly where notions of a national curriculum, national assessment, national teacher training and registration requirements are significant - along with benchmarks for expenditure and delivery agreements and outcome measures.

There is nothing inherently wrong with such negotiations. What does have to be guarded against are (a) the further privatisation of education, and the subsequent hierarchisation of schools and (b) the managerial simplification of the complex and diverse provision of education in a complex and diverse society such as Australia.

We have already seen that the quasi privatisation of public systems of education brings about a greater vertical separation of schools and students (and communities) than previously existed, rather than the horizontal diversity that was promised by the advocates of change. We have also noted that the construction of curriculum and assessment for essentially managerial ends is likely to frustrate the work of schools. It is quite clearly frustrating the work of a lot of teachers.

What we have not done is explore the potential of such competitive educational markets and simplistic, economically rationalistic managerial devices for reducing social solidarity in a society which prides itself on its ability to accommodate difference and deliver social justice: the society of the "fair go".

Education, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice

I want, in this final section to address the relationship between education, cultural diversity and social justice. I will set aside issues of class, gender, disability or geography - not that I regard them as of little importance, quite the opposite - but rather that by concentrating on the issue of 'cultural diversity', I can illustrate some of the ways in which difference is an issue that can only be ignored at our peril. By extension, I hope you can construct similar arguments in each of these other vitally important areas.

The privatisation of state education through quasi market structures and the simplification of managerial control through benchmarking is a serious danger to the integration of Australian society. The extent and location of cultural differences is frequently not appreciated. For instance, while we generally are aware of the inward flow of migration, few of us understand the degree of differentiation it is producing state by state.

For instance, as The Age reported on the basis of a recent study:

> ".....Melbourne is the adopted home of migrants from southern Europe. Sydney is the destination for those from North-East Asia, Perth is where you will find the British, the Indians and Malaysians.
>
> While Australia's four million migrants have changed the lifestyles of cities all over the country, the latest census reveals an astonishingly

strong trend for migrants from the same region to cluster in the same city.

Between them, Melbourne and Sydney have the numbers in almost every migrant group. But as a share of population, each capital city has a specialty in migrants from particular regions.

Adelaide, for example, has always been a haven for German migrants. Figures from the 1991 census show it still is. One in 90 Adelaide residents were born in Germany' one in 80 still speak German at home - more than in any other city.

But it is not only Germans who have chosen Adelaide. The census shows it has Australia's largest concentration of migrants from Poland, Germany's eastern neighbour; from the Ukraine, Poland's eastern neighbour; and from Latvia, a little north.

It is as though the VFL commissioners of old had defined North-East Europe as Adelaide's recruiting zone.

Sydney's new recruiting zone, is North-East Asia. One in 35 Sydney residents on census night was born in China, Hong Kong, Korea or Japan. More than half our migrants from China and Hong Kong have settled in Sydney, as well as 73 per cent from Korea.

Add overseas Chinese, and on census night you could hear 112,951 Sydney residents speaking Chinese languages (mainly Cantonese). They outnumber Italians and Greeks.

But Sydney's main recruiting zone is at the far end of Asia. The most common foreign language in the harbour city is Arabic. One in 30 Sydney residents speak Arabic at home; there are three times more Lebanese migrants in Sydney than in the rest of Australia.

But what of the ethnic group we identify with Sydney, the Kiwis? Nope. While almost one in 50 of Sydney's population flew, sailed or swam across the Tasman to get there, many of the Kiwis fleeing to Australia's warmth clearly want it full-strength.

Brisbane is the true home of Australia's second-largest migrant group, with one in 30 residents born in New Zealand [including Sir Joh]. It has more Papua New Guineans than any other Australian city.

While Brisbane has far fewer migrants than any other large city, a comparison with Melbourne defines its recruiting zone: its populations

of Fijians, New Zealanders and Papua New Guineans all outnumber Melbourne's.

Melbourne's main recruiting zone traditionally has been the Mediterranean. Melbourne has the lion's share of migrants from every country from Italy and Malta west to Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey.

Two in every five migrants from this region have settled in Melbourne. One in 18 people in Melbourne [155,480 in all] speak Italian at home. One in 22 Melburnians [122,728] speak Greek.

But Melbourne too has recruiting zones in Asia. The biggest is in Indochina: one in 60 Melburnians were born in Vietnam or Cambodia, the largest concentration of any Australian city. Cantonese is the third most common foreign language in the city, while Vietnamese is the fourth.

Two other Asian groups have decided to call Melbourne home. The city has half the Sri Lankans in Australia, and almost half the [mainly Indian] Mauritian community.

That is unusual. Migrants from elsewhere around the Indian Ocean tend to go to Perth with one in 50 residents coming from Malaysia or Singapore. One in 100 come from India. And one in 130 come from South Africa.

Indeed, Perth has more people from Singapore than either Sydney or Melbourne, three times its size. It also has Australia's highest relative concentrations of Irish and Dutch migrants. But its great specialty, of course, is the British.

No other Australian city has such a concentration of migrants from one country as the British in Perth. They make up 15 per cent of Perth's population. There are 170,000 of them, almost as many as in Melbourne.

And Hobart? Well, Hobart has only one national specialty: Australians. Just one in eight of its people were born anywhere else, and most of them come from Britain and New Zealand. If you don't like our ethnic melting pot, that's the place to be."

— [The Age, 29 April 1994]

Now such diversity presents schools with major challenges [as well as opportunities]. Schools, on the whole, cope with them fairly well - despite

very poor resources. However, if the development of the National Curriculum, National Assessment, National Benchmarks and the National Languages Policy all come together in a simplified management and resource structure that fails to address the diversity of the cultural experience with which teachers and schools are confronted, then problems will be forced on to teachers, schools, parents and communities which they may not be able to cope with. And such a structure is indeed possible. For instance Iredale and Fox from the University of Wollongong have recently released a report on language policy in N.S.W. According to press reports of the study:

> ".....the report raises significant issues....not only does it expose a desperate need for more resources in English language training, but it also criticises federal and state government policy of setting priority languages.
>
> The authors warn that official recognition of priority 'super-languages' could lead to a backlash against multi-culturalism and compound racism in Australia. Dr. Iredale says the fostering of super-languages could create more division in society by setting some groups up as more important than others. "You must take a totally non-racist view towards education and that means valuing all cultures and all societies equally."
>
> [Maclean,1994]

And this is, by extension, the point I wish to make about social justice. Education is not simply a technical process - as the managerial and competitive market structures would have us believe - a process where through behavioural techniques competencies can be acquired, accumulated, assessed and displayed on request. Education is also a <u>moral</u> enterprise through which the social allocation of value is accomplished. As Bob Connell reminds us in his recent ' Schools and Social Justice':

> ".....Teaching has been described as a 'moral trade', and I think this is profoundly true. Teaching and learning, as social practices, <u>always</u> involve questions about purposes and criteria for action [whether those purposes are shared or not], about the application of resources [including authority and knowledge] and about responsibility and the consequences of action.... these issues cannot be evaded. If you try to dodge them by going into value-neutral technocratic mode and teaching only information [an attitude common, for instance, in natural science and mathematics teaching] then <u>by default</u> you are teaching lessons of moral indifference and lack of responsibility..... the moral quality of education is inevitably affected by the moral character of educational institutions. If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. <u>The quality of education for</u>

all of the others is degraded..... the issue of social justice is not an add-on. It is fundamental to what good education is about."

[Connell1993:15]

Now, while I have, perhaps, not addressed the issue of quality education in quite the specific terms you might have expected, I hope I have shown how a combination of current developments point us towards great problems in the achievement of quality education: the vocationalisation of the curriculum; the shifts towards competency-based education and assessment; the nationalising of curriculum and assessment; the nomination of educational content which excludes notions of cultural difference and social justice; the reduction of resources through benchmarking; the devolution of responsibility for shortfalls but the centralisation of control through managerial yardsticks in standards and frameworks; the failures to recognise the complexity of learning, teaching and schooling. All conspire to reduce the quality of a quality system while reallocating resources from the marginal, the different, the poor and concentrating them through a competitive market model on those who are already advantaged. Simultaneously the reduction of collective mechanisms (bureaucracies, support networks, curriculum and professional development centres and structures) makes protest and the reassertion of our collective responsibilities that much more difficult. This is a major challenge to all of us concerned with the construction of a culturally diverse, socially just, quality education for all. It is a challenge I am sure the Association will accept.

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